

## **Identity of Place – Revitalization of Memory. Home, Sanctuary, Cemetery**

**Roman Batko\***

### **1. Research problem**

The basic research problem raised in this chapter can be boiled down to whether the revitalization of places, understood as granting the space its lost values, to be effective, must go hand in hand with the intellectual process of restoring memory. I applied the interpretative approach as the research method, in which the understanding of the depicted reality is preceded by the interpretation of symbols [see: Kostera, 2005; Konecki, 2000]. In the summer of 2009, I conducted my observation in Szetejnie, Krasnogruda, Supraśl, Wierszalin and Jedwabne, supporting its results with text analysis.

### **2. Memory and identity**

If we understand identity as belonging to a community professing the same ideas and values, then we will agree that memory and continuity, especially towards the ‘liquidity’ of postmodern era, may play a crucial role, especially since the identity, as Z. Bauman writes [2007, p. 18], appears to us rather as something to be created, and not explored; as an object of our efforts, ‘a goal which one has to attain; as something that we have to throw together from parts, or choose from the available entirety, and then to fight for it and protect it.’ Identity is therefore a challenge, and not something that is given to us, if only by the fact of birth in a particular territory. Such a creation of an individual identity is an expression of a need of belonging, overcoming despair resulting from the loneliness of man. A real space becomes the material, read symbolically as a system of meaningful relationships. There is an etymological connection of the symbol with the identity. In the Greek language *symbolon* meant an object that was divided into two halves, in order to be put together at a proper time, thus confirming the identity of the messenger [Koster, 2005, p. 32]. Today, thanks to the symbols we no longer confirm the identity, but we (re)construct it. This way, a ‘new authenticity’ or ‘real imaginary space’ is being built -

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\* Roman Batko – Jagiellonian University Institute of Public Affairs

something which in itself is real, with all the attributes of reality, yet is completely different from 'realities' on which it is modeled, or which it seeks to evoke. It is, therefore, more a process of 'creating' rather than 'reconstructing' [Gruber, 2008]. A. Lubecka [2005] refers to the mental-emotional identity map, consisting of signs - symbols, through which our identity gains confirmation, takes real shape, and most importantly – allows to take a journey inside oneself. Therefore, revitalisation not only has to include the physical sphere of the objects, but also give the revitalised space a symbolic dimension, in accordance with the thesis of G.J. Ashworth [1993, p. 30] that 'heritage is created anew by each generation, according to the dominant approach towards the past and its use.' Space is not only a scenery or a backdrop, it is experienced and created by man who enters with it into a dialogue of endless interpretations [Wyrobiec, 2008]. In terms of the philosophy of dialogue space becomes a drama stage. This idea was developed in the "Philosophy of the drama" by J. Tischner [1990], who pointed at home, church and cemetery as those artifacts of space which prejudice the inveteracy of a man and the taming of his loneliness. A home is a space that is closest to the man who while traveling around the world, estimates the traveled distance as the distance away from home. *Settling in* does not take place in solitude, but in relations with another human. Solitary people build cells or hideaways [Tischner 1990, p. 187-189]. This is a very important category, differentiating space to the one which forms along with the participation of others, and the one that is an escape space – from the world's wretchedness, or due to fear. Nevertheless, a home - not only in the physical meaning - is fragile. Of course, fire, flood or an earthquake can destroy a home in a blink of an eye. But a home is fragile also in a deeper, metaphorical sense. People can deny reciprocity, and without it, a home does not exist. A normal passage of time causes people who created a home, to leave. What in that case can make it last? Living memory, understood as the presence of people in that space, people who *identify* with the members of the household. Dwelling means to recall the history, learn from it and have fun with it but at the same time subjectively redefine it, to make it an inspiration for the future. The temple is a place of special relations not only between human beings, but also between a humanbeing and *sacrum*. Tischner writes that 'the temple opens up the horizon of a completely different reality,' [1990, p. 191]. Temple arouses emotions, it is hard to be indifferent to it. The followers are willing to die for it, infidels want to destroy it. The modern traveler, regardless of the belief, visits temples of different religions, recognizing former (and perhaps today's) passions in them, admiring their exquisite layer of material. Let us notice that the temples, regardless which religion we are talking about, are the most

amazing manifestations of human management. The beauty of the architectural solid, the richness of the interior decorations, painting and sculpture masterpieces. Temple, however, is primarily a material symbol of some religious idea. It is also the fate of the community that built this temple and prayed in it. It is usually this layer which determines these sites to be places of focus, peace, dignity. The ritual celebrated in the temple has theatrical features. Clearly different from the colloquial speech, full of significant props, managed in a way sanctified by the tradition, underlining at the same time the historical (ahistorical?) continuity and identity. In ancient Greece theater evolved from a cult of gods. Undoubtedly some of the contemporary manifestations of the theatrical *imitatio* are a search of what seems to be the source for the theater - the fate, good and evil, mystery and metaphysics.

The cemetery is not so much a place of separation, but a meeting place with the dead, who become ancestors. 'By going to the cemetery, we return to those who were' [Tischner, 1990, p. 192]. To build a cemetery and a grave is to take up heritage. After experiencing the Holocaust the cemetery turned out to be the only legacy for entire nations, the Jews and the Romani. The cemetery also demands reciprocity. It will play its community-constructive role so far as the graves are to be visited by someone who will feel the legacy. Abandoned cemeteries are very severe symptom of lack of memory and lack of identity. In many places we can find abandoned Jewish cemeteries, with broken headstones, sunked into the ground. It is an evidence that a multi-generational continuity of the community was brutally interrupted, that there is nobody to inherit. The cemetery can also be treated as a book, from which we can read (directly, for example from the inscriptions on the tombstones, or by using imagination, from a photograph, date of birth and death, associations connected with the surname) individual stories. There are also nameless, symbolic graves. Usually, they show a tragic history, being an open wound, sometimes a painful remorse.

The below mentioned three examples illustrate, in my opinion, additionally the added value that they are located in a historical context of multiculturalism and tensions associated with ethnic, language and religious identity. Revitalization of such an area, therefore, carries along real challenges.

### **3. Home – Szetejnie, Krasnogruda. Mythologisation of space**

Szetejnie in Lithuania, where in 1911, Cz. Miłosz was born, is a place above the Niewiaża valley - Issa from his novels. A land having its literary life much more intense than the one existing in the reality, especially the modern one. Miłosz, using the image of

the Niewiaża valley that he kept since the early childhood, gives this space a metaphysical dimension, writing *de facto* not a novel but a theological treatise, in which the main character, Tomaszek by living in heavenly innocence, gradually discovers different aspects of the evil encroaching into the Arcadian space. It is built as a mythical space from the first cards of the novel, inhabited equally by humans and devils, whose presence is as natural as others, even animal existence.

*The peculiarity of the Issa Valley is the greater number of devils than elsewhere. Perhaps rotten willows, mills, thickets at the river banks are particularly comfortable for the beings that show themselves to humans only when they wish to do so. (...) Farmers living near the Issa river used to put at the threshold a bowl of milk for gentle water snakes that were not afraid of humans. Then they became devout Catholics, and the presence of devils reminded them about the fight, that is conducted over the ultimate control of the human soul. What will happen tomorrow? While describing one does not know which tense to choose, present or past, as if what had passed, was not entirely past, as long as memory lasts among generations - or only one chronicler.* [Miłosz, 2000, p. 12-14]

The feature of the mythical space, indicated by the author of "The Issa Valley, is the existence beyond time - what has passed, is not quite past. Today's Szetejń will not be found on maps, it is just a few huts surrounded by a limitless field.

Although the Kunats', Miłosz's grandparents, mansion survived war turmoil, a kolkhoz was located there during the Soviet occupation, which effectively led the mansion buildings to ruins and their eventual demolition in the 1960's. Miłosz lived in Szetejnie for a short period of time, in the years 1911-1913 and 1918-1921, but they appear as an important reference point for the future professor of Slavic studies at Berkeley and a Nobel Prize winner, returning repeatedly in his writings:

*Today I read these memoirs avidly, knowing the value of the names of towns, road bends, hills and river ferries.*

*How much one has to value the province and home, and dates and the trace of the people who passed.* [Miłosz, 2009, p. 91]



Fig. 1. Szetejnie, August 2009.

*Source: author's archive*

‘A man becomes attached to his home’ – as quoted after J. Tischner. ‘Attachment to home is so deep and powerful that it surpasses human consciousness. When a man loses home, when he moves away from home - he feels the power of settling in in the pain caused by the loss’ [1990, p. 188].

Miłosz came back to Szetejnie in 1992 after decades of traveling around the world, and the fruit of this journey is one of his most beautiful poems, from a volume "Facing The River" from 1994

#### *IN SZETEJNIE*

*I*

*You were my beginning and again I am with you, here, where  
I learned the four quarters of the globe.*

*Below, behind the trees, the River's quarter; to the back, behind the buildings, the  
quarter of the Forest; to the right, the quarter of the Holy Ford; to the left, the quarter  
of the Smithy and the Ferry.*

*Whenever I wandered, through whatever continents, my face was always  
turned to the River.*

*Feeling in my mouth the taste and the scent of the rosewhite flesh of calamus.*

*Hearing old pagan songs of harvesters returning from the fields, while  
the sun on quiet evenings was dying out behind the hills.*

*In the greenery gone wild I could still locate the place of an arbor  
where you forced me to draw my first awkward letters.*

*And I would try to escape to my hideouts, for I was  
certain that I would never learn how to write.*

*I did not expect, either, to learn  
that though bones fall into dust, and dozens of years pass,  
there is still the same presence.*

*That we could, as we do, live in the realm of eternal  
mirrors, working our way at the same time through unmowed grasses.*

## *II*

*You held the reins and we were riding, you and me, in a one-horse britzka,  
for a visit to the big village by the forest.*

*The branches of its apple trees and pear trees were bowed down under the weight of  
fruits,  
ornate carved porches stood out above little gardens of mallow and rue.*

*Your former pupils, now farmers, entertained us  
with talks of crops, women showed their looms  
and deliberated with you about the colors of the warp and the woof.*

*On the table slices of ham and sausage, a honeycomb in a clay bowl, and I was  
drinking  
kvas from a tin cup.*

*I asked the director of the collective farm to show me that village;  
he took me to fields empty up to the edge of the forest, stopping the car before a huge  
boulder.*

*'Here was the village Peiksva' he said, not without triumph in his voice,  
as is usual with those on the winning side.*

*I noticed that one part of the boulder was hacked away, somebody had tried  
to smash the stone with a hammer, so that not even that trace might remain.*

## *III*

*I ran out in a summer dawn into the voices of the birds,  
and I returned, but between the two moments I created my work.*

*Even though it was so difficult to pull up the stick of n, so it joined the stick of u  
or to dare building a bridge between r and z.*

*I kept a reedlike penholder and dipped its nib in the ink,  
a wandering scribe, with an ink pot at his belt.*

*Now I think one's work stands in the stead of happiness  
and becomes twisted by horror and pity.*

*Yet the spirit of this place must be contained in my work, just as it is contained in you  
who were led by it since childhood.*

*Garlands of oak leaves, the ave-bell calling for the May service, I wanted to be good  
and not to walk among the sinners.*

*But now when I try to remember how it was, there is only a pit,  
and it's so dark, I cannot understand a thing.*

*All we know is that sin exists and punishment exists, whatever  
philosophers would like us to believe.*

*If only my work were of use to people and of more weight than is my evil.*

*You alone, wise and just, would know how to calm me,  
explaining that I did as much as I could.*

*That the gate of the Black Garden closes, peace, peace,  
what is finished is finished.*  
[Miłosz, 2009, p. 78–80]

Revitalization of this site took place in 1992, thanks to Miłosz's friend from the University of California, Professor Algirdas Avizienis, who was the chancellor of the university in Kaunas at that time. A granary was rebuilt and a Czesław Miłosz Conference Center has been located inside it. When in 1997, after several years of effort taken by Professor Avizienis to revendicate the property, Miłosz was given the deed of ownership of Szetejnie, he passed it as a gift to the Fundacja Miejsc Rodzinnych Czesława Miłosza [The Czesław Miłosz Birthplace Foundation], which takes care of this place [[http://www.milosz.lt/miloszas\\_sateiniaipl.htm](http://www.milosz.lt/miloszas_sateiniaipl.htm), access: 7 December 2009].

Mythical space has come back to life, adopting a completely new function - a meeting place for the Poles and Lithuanians, who learn about one another through art or scientific discourse. Plein-air workshops, symposia and scientific conferences are organized in Szetejnie. The effects of the first of them titled: 'The Issa Valley', organized in 2001, are most visible - numerous wooden sculptures were situated in the mansion's park, evoking themes from the works of Miłosz.



Fig. 2. Szetejnie, Czesław Miłosz Conference Center, August 2009..  
*Source: author's archive*



Fig. 3. Szetejnie, park, August 2009.  
*Source: author's archive*



Thus Miłosz's dream of young people coming to Szetejnie to look for inspiration has fulfilled. A dream, in which they come not so much to a specific physical space, as to their interior, thanks to the revitalized memory and rediscovered (created?) identity of the place. This idea is also implemented by the 'Borderland' Centre in Sejny, which for many years strived for funds for the mansion revitalization project in Krasnogruda, situated on the Polish-Lithuanian border, at the Hołny lake. In this property, owned by the family of his mother Veronica, nee Kunat, Cz. Miłosz spent several youthful holiday. Some of the poems published in a volume 'Three Winters' (1936) have been created there, and many images and experiences from Krasnogruda accompanied Miłosz in different periods of his writing. After his return from the exile he visited this place several times, and the 'Powrót' ['Back'] poem published in volume "Farther surroundings" in 1991, he wrote about Krasnogruda:

*In the old age, I went to the places, through which my early youth  
had once wandered.*

*I recognized the smells, the lines of glacial hills,  
oval lake's basins.*

*I forced my way through the bushes, where once a park was, but I haven't  
found any traces of the avenue.*

*I was at the water and like in the past the wave stormed,  
Unimaginable sameness, incomprehensible separation.*

*(...)*

*And now after a long life, deceptively fair, wise  
just searching, I ask whether it was worth it.*

[Miłosz, 2004, p. 278–279]

Last heirs of Krasnogruda - Czesław and Andrzej Miłosz, and Janina and Andrzej Jurewicz - wanted to establish a Centre of Central and Eastern Europe Little Homelands in the mansion under the auspices of the 'Borderland - of arts, cultures, nations' Centre and the 'Borderland' Foundation [[http://pogranicze.sejny.com / archive / Krasnogruda / index.htm](http://pogranicze.sejny.com/archive/Krasnogruda/index.htm), access: 19 February 2010]. The project, funded in 85% from the Norwegian funds, will include the reconstruction of the mansion (pulling the building down and putting it together from the scratch with the same elements), the reconstruction of a non-existent mansion outbuildings and bird-fanciers, as well as the revitalization of a wild nineteenth-century mansion park, extending over an area of approximately 5 ha. International Centre for Dialogue, which will be established in the revitalized facilities, is to include a museum of Miłosz, exhibition halls, administrative and utility rooms as well as

arts and crafts workshops for the youth work. The opening of the Centre is due to take place in late June 2011, on the 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Miłosz [http://bialystok.gazeta.pl/bialystok/1, 35233.7120397, Rozpoczela\_sie\_rewitalizacja\_dworu\_Miloszow.html, access: 19 February 2010].



Fig. 4. Mansion in Krasnogruda, August 2009.  
*Source: author's archive.*

#### **4. Church – Wierszalin – space theatricalization**

The Polish-Belarusian borderland, the Knyszyńska Virgin Forest, near Krynki and Supraśl. It is here that in the 1930's a New Jerusalem in Grzybowszczyzna was supposed to be erected, The Capital of the World - Wierszalin. An extraordinary phenomenon of late Millenarianism, the emergence of folk prophets, apostles, incarnations of the Mothers of God, tsars and emperors has been introduced very interestingly, while building a modern myth of Wierszalin, by Włodzimierz Pawluczuk. Migration of Orthodox peasants in the face of warfare during the First World War, the impact of the communist ideology, and thus a collapse of the orderly and consistent for centuries world gave birth to a 'strong spiritual power, discontent with present day and fear before tomorrow. Various rural prophets and apostles of new faiths prophesize inevitable end of the world' [Pawluczuk, 1999, p. 9]. Pawluczuk's narration based on witnesses stories of that time shows Elias Klimowicz - the future prophet Ilya, the old, 'uneducated' peasant who 'knew how to read a little bit, but did not know how to write.' By coincidence and due to miraculous deliverance of the village from the bandit Półtorak he became famous, and his fame increased even more when he began to build an Orthodox church in the village. Women from Grzybowszczyzna and other villages while collecting in this case, said 'incredible

things about Ilya.’ ‘And ignorant people began to believe that in Grzybowski Grzybowszczyzna biblical prophet Ilya rose from the dead or descended from heaven, that the church miraculously grew from the earth, and many other such tales. Believed in and followed the crowds’ [Pawluczuk, 2008, p. 59]. Wierszalin and the Polish-Belarusian borderline became a scene of the anthropological theater. Daily space became a sanctuary, simple peasants - playing the role of prophets. But it was not an aware theater, it is only our perspective that allows us to see an acting troupe in a sect. Theatricalization at certain points turns to a dramatic form and content, especially that of 1936, when the crowd wanted to crucify Ilja to fill (and repeated) evangelical scenario of the last hours of Christ.

*It was summer 1936, the harvest season. The procession of the peasant went along dirt roads, people were tired, they walked from far away, the sun tired ones back and forehead, shirts were damp, bare feet were burned by the baked sand. They walked from the south using high roads among the sandy hills, covered with junipers and mullein. In the valleys they passed the reapers ... who put their hands to their forehead and looked amazed: a man at the head of the procession carried a large wooden cross. The cross was new, recently hewn wood still shone in the sun. As it was heavy, every few hundred steps it was moved on to another arms. Nevertheless, the procession moved slowly. People following the cross carried a hammer and nails. The hammer was specially forged at the local blacksmith, the nails were also made on order - larger than usual, angular. Everything just like at the symbolic Golgotha constructed every year in the middle of the orthodox church in the days of Lent. They also carried a crown of thorns made of rusty barbed wire, taken from a fence. They even had bone whips to whip the martyr, even a pike made of a scythe edgewise to pierce his side. They were going to crucify the Christ, who descended into the world again, this time in the person of Elijah Klimowicz, the prophet from Grzybowski Grzybowszczyzna. He had to be crucified again, because the previous redemption was too long ago, people forgot about the sacrifice, devil reigned in the world, everywhere corruption, sin, Sodom Gomorrah, there was no other hope for humanity, but to repeat the redemption. (...) They were going to find holy Ilja in Grzybowski Grzybowszczyzna. One of the pilgrims, who knew him - was to approach Ilya and kiss him, then they will capture him, giving Judas thirty silver coins, they will put a crown on Ilya's head and while spitting on him, they shall beat him with rods and whips, then they will tore his clothes off of him, put a cross on his shoulders, and lead him to the hill, which henceforth will be called Golgotha. (...) Ilya apostles will have to find sheets in the empty tomb, announce that Ilya has risen from the dead, meet him on the road from Grzybowski Grzybowszczyzna to Emmaus. And the*

*world will be saved. (...) And they, torturers, murderers? (...). They condemned themselves to eternal damnation, they chose for themselves shame and hell - only to save the humanity! They wanted to speed up the course of history, in order for the things that had to happen, to happen as soon as possible. They decided to sacrifice themselves. But they didn't sacrifice their miserable earthly life, they sacrificed their eternal life. Who then can match their generosity and devotion?*

*[Pawluczuk, 2008, p. 1953-1955]*

The above mentioned attempt of holiness ended up with Ilya's escape. The crowd searched the neighborhood and as they did not find the prophet, who was hiding in a potatoe hole for three days, they parted the following day, leaving the cross standing at the crossroads. A similar, fortunately bloodless due to escape, attempt of holiness happened to a local saint John the Baptist, who lived Pieńki near Michałowo. A procession came to him, singing and with sacred icons and banners, and an ax and a large tray. Theatricalization of life and space was becoming every-day reality. Conventionality of decorations and roles also led to the denial of life in space and time. Heresy mythologised space.

Modern Wierszalin actually does not exist. Near the old buildings, at a dirt road in the forest a signboard briefly describing the phenomenon of the prophet Ilya has been placed, at the overgrown clearing stands a barn still remembering those times.

Revitalization of space also in this case does not mean restoring back to life the physical mementos of the past. Besides, they were not the ones deciding upon the value of the myth of Wierszalin. 'Nothing has survived from the real, physical Wierszalin' - says W. Pawluczuk [1999, p. 116]. 'What has left is the idea of Wierszalin. Why and what for? What have we been looking for and what are we looking for today? And what do we find?'. It seems that from the perspective of a modern man satisfying the longing for hierophany, the presence of holiness in daily life, the retention of time and exploring the mythical and sacred dimension in space is attractive. Such memory reconstruction and revitalization of the idea of Wierszalin naturally takes place in the theater. Jerzy Grotowski and his Laboratory, Włodzimierz Staniewski, founder of the Gardzienice theater, drew their inspiration from Wierszalin but it is the theater group founded in 1991 by the director Peter Tomaszuk and a group of actors working with him, whose office is located close to Wierszalin - in Supraśl.





Fig. 5. Wierszalin, August 2009.  
*Source: author's archive.*



Fig. 6. Wierszalin, August 2009.  
*Source: author's archive.*



Fig. 7. Wierszalin Theatre in Supraśl, August 2009.

*Source: author's archive.*



Fig. 8. 'Wierszalin. Reportaż o końcu świata' [Wierszalin. A reportage on the end of the world'] directed by Piotr Tomaszuk.

*Source: <http://www.wierszalin.pl/index.php?SpektaklPhoto=258> (access 8 December 2009).*





Fig. 9. 'Wierszalin. Reportaż o końcu świata' ['Wierszalin. A reportage on the end of the world'] directed by Piotr Tomaszuk.

Source: <http://www.wierszalin.pl/index.php?SpektaklPhoto=261> (access 8 December 2009).

The Wierszalin Theatre is very well recognized in the world. Compared with the Laboratory of Jerzy Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor's Cricot 2, it developed its own theatrical language, which is based on simplicity, singing and dancing, symbolism of props. The troupe visited the scenes of Tokyo, Chicago, Toronto, London, Sydney, at the World Exhibition EXPO 2000 in Hanover, frequently performed in Germany, Italy and Switzerland, achieved a spectacular success, appearing in 2005 on the stage of New York's LA MAMA Theatre. Wierszalin is a three-time winner of the prestigious Fringe First Award, awarded at the World Theatre Festival in Edinburgh. In 1994 it received from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland a certificate of appreciation for an outstanding contribution to the Polish culture in the world, and in 1998 the Critics' Award of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) in recognition of the values brought to the world theater [<http://www.wierszalin.com/index.php?stronaOTeatrze>, access: December 8, 2009]. In 2007, more than thirty years after the release of W. Pawluczuk's book describing the phenomenon of Wierszalin, the premiere performance of 'Wierszalin. A reportage on the end of the world' directed by Peter Tomaszuk took place. In this case we are dealing with the phenomenon of a metatheatre. Theatricalization, which took place in real space a few decades ago, has been transferred to the scene, recreating (revitalizing) that longing and hope to all that is spiritual in a human being, though sometimes madness, is constant and does not devalue, in contrast to the disposable matter.

### **5. Cemetery – Jedwabne – annihilation of space**

The first impression one experiences when leaving the car at the market square in Jedwabne, is hostile silence. A state of lurking, awaiting. Less than 1800 inhabitants, provincial vagueness, near the magnificent, unspoiled nature of the Biebrza valley. And a dramatic story of the pogrom, committed by the residents of Jedwabne on their Jewish neighbors. July 10, 1941 1600 Jews were taken to the barn and burned alive. Shocking eyewitness accounts can be found in J. Gross's book 'Neighbors' [2000] and A. Bikont's 'My z Jedwabnego' ['We from Jedwabne'] [2004]. Events from over sixty years ago marked this space. In memory of not only the Jews, Jedwabne became a cemetery. S. Obirek [2008, p. 131] writes that 'the Holocaust, in a way, forces to take a clear stand, to determine one's opinion. This applies to both the victims and the witnesses and even perpetrators or the descendants of these three groups.' And it is this third group, 'the descendants of the perpetrators', and especially their attitude towards the past, is the subject of the following reflection. Today's residents of Jedwabne are doing everything to forget about that tragedy, and even to redirect the memory to a completely different direction. They want to remember other facts and they use them to make the most important narration for their identity. However, Gross [2000, p. 77] notices that it is impossible to escape from such a trauma. 'I think that in a town, where the inhabitants have the chance to speak about who murdered how many people and how, it was difficult to talk about something else.' If you can not escape, you can try to confuse the clues. One of the methods is building alternative spaces. When asked for directions to the monument of the victims of the massacre the residents of Jedwabne either with undisguised hostility towards the asking person refuse to indicate the route, or point to other monuments – monument of the victims of mass resettlements to Siberia and the memorial to the fallen and murdered in years 1939-1956 by the Soviets and Germans located near the parish cemetery. What is important, both monuments, were raised after unveiling the monument to the memory of the Jews murdered in 1941.

The only mention of the murder and the monument on the official website of the town, deeply hidden, has a very meaningful content: '10<sup>th</sup> July 2001 in Jedwabne, a ceremony unveiling a monument commemorating the massacre of the Jews in 1941 was held, and 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2003 a monument of the victims of mass resettlements to Siberia was unveiled' and comes from the 'historic buildings and areas of the town and the commune of Jedwabne' [<http://www.jedwabne.pl/index.php?k=17>, access: 8<sup>th</sup> December 2009]. There is no



information on who committed this murder, no controversial establishments of the historians. The tab 'History' on the same website confirms the desire to escape from the memory and the truth through silence. History, which selects particular episodes according to the established programme policies and eliminates inconvenient facts is a lie. 'Brief History' in a few sentences shows the origin of the medieval settlement and refers the reader to the Annex 'History of Jedwabne and the region between 1939-1941' in which we can read only about the persecution of the population of Jedwabne by the Soviets, identified by the author of the text with the Jews-Communists. We shall not find any information on the pogrom in 1941. Official history of Jedwabne ends before that tragedy.



Fig. 10. Official website of the town of Jedwabne, a section devoted to its history  
Source: <http://www.jedwabne.pl/index.php?k=53> (access 8 December 2009).

Quotes from the article on the website leave no doubt as to the intentions of the author: *All the political and civil freedoms have been abolished, and the local Communist militiamen, many of whom were Jews, commonly used violence and lawlessness. (...)*

*Witnesses point out in their accounts, that firstly those persons were arrested to whom the Jews and the Communists had earlier claims. Other accounts indicate that the persons arrested were mainly denounced by the locals. Soviet authorities established a militia, which included mostly Jewish communists. (...)*

*In the accounts it is stressed that: 'I remember how they deported Poles to Siberia, at each cart sat a Jew with a rifle. Mothers, wives, children kneeled down before them, begging for mercy. The last time 20<sup>th</sup> June 1941.' Józef Klimaszewski emphasized in his diary: 'When the Poles were taken to the Siberia, outcasts of their nation [Jews] were laughing, that the Poles are going on a pilgrimage to Częstochowa. (...)*

*As a result of conspiracy and guerrilla warfare in the years 1939-1941 the Nadbiebrzański Region society suffered very large and painful losses. They can be expressed not only in hundreds of resettled, but also in hundreds of arrested, especially in summer and autumn of 1940, in killed and wounded in the war, broken families, when the men had to hide, and their wives and children have been taken by force to the Soviet Union in June 1941. This coincides with the shadow left on the psyche of this society. This, however, did not prevent it from further active participation in fighting the Germans, which was as intense here as in other areas of the Łomża region, and did not prevent from fight with the communist enslavement after the war, which lasted until the early fifties. (...)*

*The new political system and the 'revolutionary order' was brought by people in gray greatcoats, who treated this land as a social and political desert, having despised the specificity of these lands, people who live here, their tradition, culture, customs and religion. [Http://www.jedwabne.pl/index.php?k=54, access: December 8, 2009]*

Jews-communists led to great suffering of the population of Jedwabne, so - you obviously will not read it directly, but we are supposed to deduce - the murder had its reasons, which allow to justify it. According to the author it is obvious that - Jews are Soviet occupiers and not neighbors.

The stronger the inscription on the monument reads 'In memory of the Jews from Jedwabne and surrounding areas, men, women, children, co-farmers of this land, murdered, burned alive in this place 10<sup>th</sup> July 1941.' Monument could stand after 60 years since the tragedy. He stood against the will of the majority population, which is still very noticeable. A. Bikont, while collecting for more than three years testimonies on that day, holding hundreds of meetings and talks, noticed in the attitudes of the inhabitants of Jedwabne something that H. Arendt called the 'banality of evil.' These people do not see a dramatic gap between their views on the crimes that occurred in their town, and the professed principles of their religion, social roles – of a priest, teacher and educator, mother and father.

*At first I thought about Jedwabne, as a poor, God-forgotten town, which had to face a difficult role of bearing some uncomfortable truth. For most residents an undeserved burden – neither did they participate in that, nor do they even come from here. As the time went by I got used to thinking about it as a land of evil, like Tolkien's Mordor. I repeat to myself that seeking testimonies of crime, I talk only to some part of my interlocutor, with his dark point. The head teacher, who condones raising children in the spirit of racial hatred, after all, is an avid organizer of canoeing. Young woman calling at night and*

*insulting her friend just because she went to see the monument (...) may be caring mother.*

[Bikont, 2004, p. 316].

J. Kuroń, writing the foreword to the book by A. Bikont, tries to explain this 'doublethinking' by referring to what he called 'covering the reality with a myth'. A myth of a murderer is based on reversing the roles - the perpetrator wants to be perceived as a victim [Kuroń, 2004, p. 14]. In the construction of this myth a significant role has been played by the Catholic Church and politicians representing national and far-right views. The myth obscured the reality, but it remains merely a mask behind which hides the true and terrible face of the torturer.

Jedwabne may try to revitalize, which means restoring town's name back to life, their own identity and history, only through a fair recovery of memory and not by hiding it and distorting it. In a way that the Hebrew language understands the word cemetery. Hebrew word for cemetery - bet chaim - means "house of life. " Otherwise, the space becomes the enemy, it is a subject to the Holocaust.



Fig. 11. A monument dedicated to the memory of the Jews, victims of a murder committed on 10th July 1941 in Jedwabne, August 2009.

*Source: author's archive.*



Fig. 12. A monument dedicated to the memory of the Jews, victims of a murder committed on 10th July 1941 in Jedwabne, August 2009.

*Source: author's archive.*

### **Conclusion**

Observations made in the article of the relationship between the spatial revitalization (of places) and the revitalization of memory may be useful in developing revitalization programs at the level of the gmina, voivodship or the state. It is not enough to restore the buildings, to raise them from ruins for the space to become significant. By "significant", I mean its symbolic dimension - sign carrier. It has to go hand in hand with the study of the memory. It can be educational programs, giving new functionality of space, a creative dialogue with it, but it can also be, as shown in the case of Jedwabne, fundamental actions for work on memory. Revitalization of memory is an essential condition for any process of (re-)building, what is more - from the quality of the restored memory depends the quality of the present and the future. Renovation of buildings, apart from the obvious fact of saving material cultural heritage, shall not necessarily provide an added value, which is rooting a modern man.

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### Summary

#### *Identity of Place – Revitalization of Memory. Home, Sanctuary, Cemetery*

In this article I attempt to explore the relationship between identity and memory. If we define identity as a sense of belonging to a community with which one shares ideals and values, we shall arrive at the conclusion that, memory and continuity, especially in the face of the „liquid modernity” of our times, may play the pivotal role in preserving, and even have the power to restore that identity. Revitalization of the space, the process which consists in giving it back the significance it has lost, should therefore be accompanied by the parallel intellectual process of restoring the memory. Human existing has been inevitably defined by shaping and imbuing with meaning the three basic categories of space: the home, the sanctuary, and the burying ground. Following the train of thought of J. Tischner, I look into their significance for our culture, and discuss three examples of thus understood revitalization of the memory: Szetejnie – the birthplace of Czesław Miłosz, a tiny Lithuanian village which has become a centre of creative activity and the living symbol of Polish-Lithuanian reconciliation, Wierszalin – a settlement in the midst of the Knyszyński Forest, near Supraśl, where the pre-war self-professed prophet, Elias Klimowicz, preached the end of the world, and whose legend and personality stand behind the conception of the avant-garde internationally acclaimed Theatre Wierszalin, and Jedwabne – the symbolic monument-cemetery, as a terrifying example of denying the place its identity, of choosing not to remember. By putting Jedwabne under scrutiny we may perhaps be able to understand the process of transformation of space, in which a home and sanctuary become at once a cemetery. This may not just happen to a village, or a city, but may also – as the experience of the Shoah has shown in the case of Polish Jews – touch the whole country.

**Keywords:** revitalization, identity, memory